

The Pulse of Parks:

A look at who's visiting Minnewaska State Park Preserve

A REPORT OF THE OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE'S ALLIANCE FOR NEW YORK STATE PARKS WINTER 2015



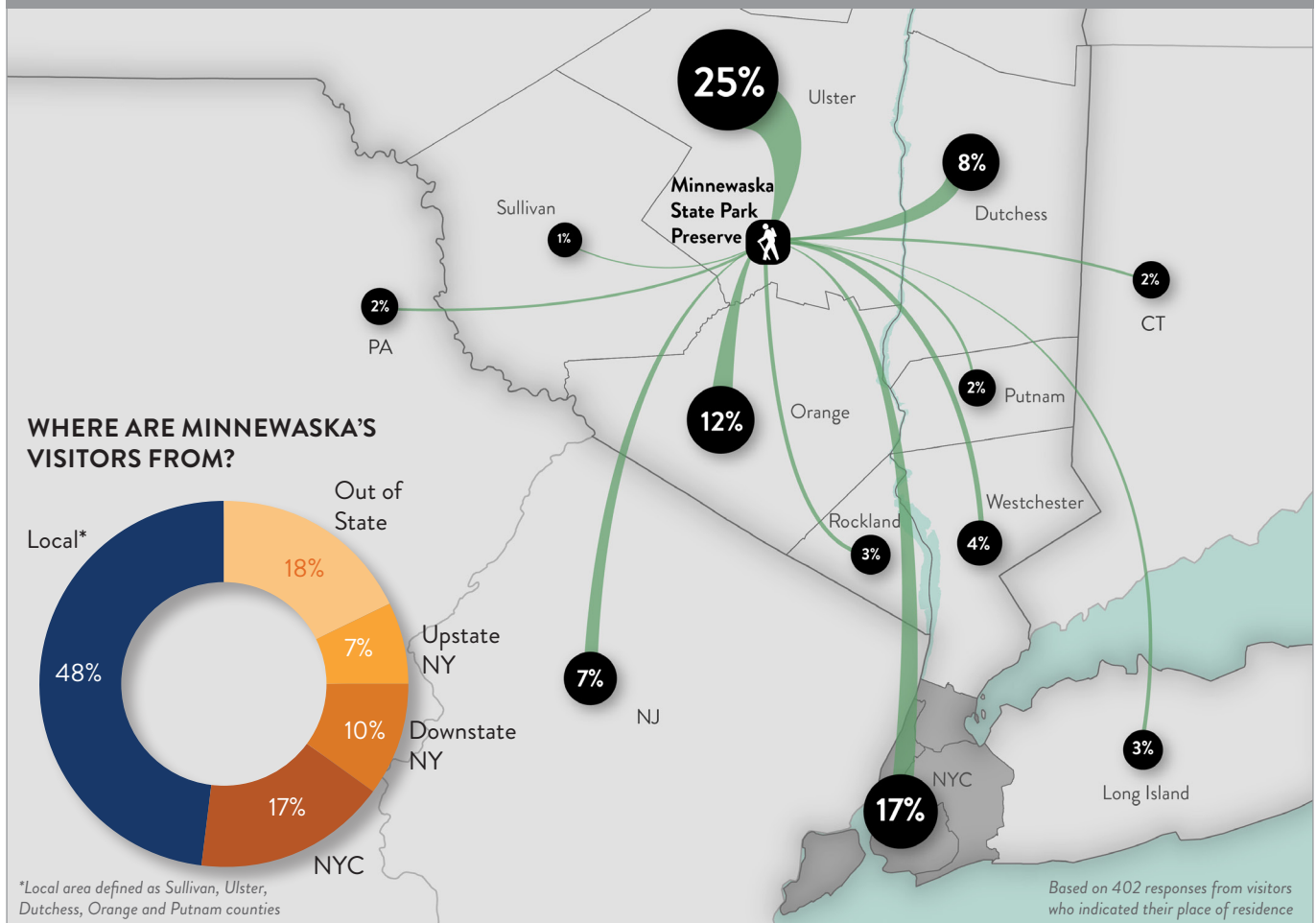
**More than half
of Minnewaska's
visitors come
from outside
the region.**

Visitors from the Hudson Valley, New York City and beyond find a needed escape in Minnewaska

Just an hour-and-a-half drive from the heart of Manhattan, Minnewaska State Park Preserve's 23,000 acres offer visitors world-class rock climbing, sky lakes for swimming, and panoramic landscape views atop the Shawangunk Ridge. Nearly 300,000 people visit the park each year to enjoy 35 miles of carriage roads and 35 miles of footpaths for biking, hiking, snow-shoeing or cross-country skiing.

This edition of The Pulse of Parks reports on a sample survey of 402 visitors to the park during the months of July through September in 2014, offering insights about park-goers' economic contributions, needed upgrades to park amenities and other subjects.

Minnewaska Attracts Visitors from All Over New York



Visitors Come from the Empire State and Beyond

As the map above reveals, the majority of visitors to Minnewaska hail from the Hudson Valley and from the New York City metropolitan area. Notably, more than half originate from beyond the counties immediately surrounding the park, with one in five coming from the city and Long Island.

While a quarter of visitors are from Ulster County, others arrive from the surrounding states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Visitors from urban and rural areas alike find a refuge in Minnewaska. One person, an enthusiastic member of the park's swimming devotees, said that he often saw city-dwellers visiting the park with their children, ecstatic to be in a rugged, natural environment.

"This place is a gift!"

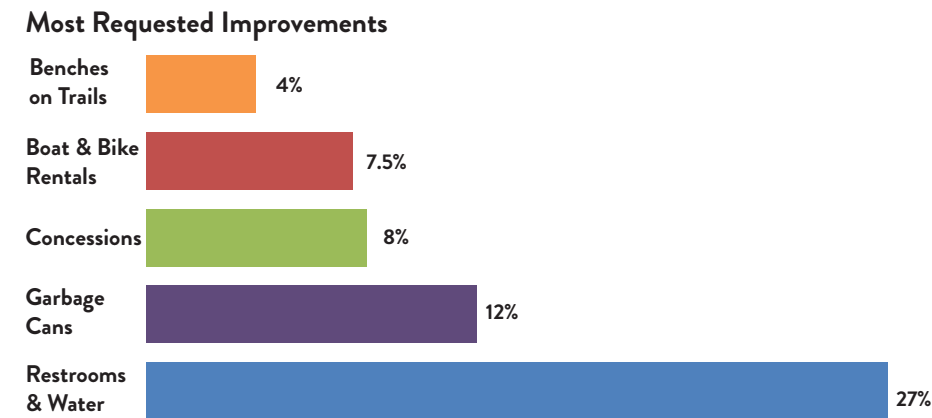
"This is a crucially important item to keep funded."

"My favorite place in the world"

Park-Goers Call for Better Amenities; Restrooms Are Key

In response to a query of key recommendations for the park, the most common response was that improvements to restrooms, called sub-standard by some, were definitely needed (below).

One frequent visitor to the park summed up the restrooms by describing how during hot weather, the restrooms, lacking a flush capability, smell very unpleasant. Meanwhile during cold weather the water is so frigid it is difficult to wash up. “The restrooms are very basic,” this person said.



Visitors felt most positive about the overall cleanliness of the park, and also gave it good marks for parking/roadways and information/signage. One praised the park’s carriage roads as a clean, well-marked part of Minnewaska, where he could see beautiful views off the Shawangunk Ridge. “No equipment needed—just a pair of tennis shoes—and you’re right there in nature,” he said.

Highest-Ranked Park Visitation Areas and Activities

About 56% of patrons said that they generally stick to a specific area within the park. The majority of these visitors prefer seeing Lake Minnewaska, while others normally stop at Lake Awosting and the waterfalls.

“This is the only decent place for long-distance swimming in the area,” said one swimmer. “Actually, I’ve swum around the world during my career in the Navy, and this place is the most sublime.”

Park visitors reported that enjoying nature through walking and hiking was their favorite activity, giving it a four out of a 1-4 scale (one person reported having just seen a bald eagle). Next were picnics (2.9) and swimming (1.9), followed by a diverse group of activities such as skiing and horseback riding. Also popular on the greater Shawangunk Ridge is rock-climbing; visitors to the area can enjoy the most routes of any climbing destination east of the Mississippi.

Outside of the park, Minnewaska’s visitors also contribute economically to the region and the greater state of New York. Seven in ten Minnewaska visitors make food or beverage purchases en route to or from the park. One in ten visitors to Minnewaska also stops for other types of retail purchases or entertainment. In all, it is estimated that visitors to Minnewaska spend a total of \$16.2 million every year on nearby foods, goods and services.

“Thank you for valuing nature enough to maintain the parks.”

“This is High Holy Ground.”

“Sit on the rocks and look out over the calm waters of Lake Minnewaska... what could be better?”

“The lake water is cool and soothing, and you can see the light reflecting from the lake surface off the cliffs and woods.”





Key Demographic Findings

Visitors to the park were split almost evenly between females and males. The median age of female visitors was 39.9 and 41.2 for males. About 16% of visitors were under 18, while 22% were over 60.

“Often large families visit the park bringing several children,” said one park visitor. “It’s a sight.”

“The children play while the parents stroll along and you can tell everyone is getting recharged by Mother Nature,” she said.

More Information

The Open Space Institute protects scenic, natural and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and working lands and sustain communities.

This report is part of a series of New York State Park user demographic studies. Previous reports have focused on Jones Beach State Park, Harri-man State Park’s Lake Welch and Walkway over the Hudson and are available for download at www.osiny.org/Publications_Alliance.

The Open Space Institute’s Alliance for New York State Parks works to protect and enhance state parks and historic sites for present and future generations. To learn more, visit www.osiny.org/alliance.



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ABOUT THIS STUDY A capital needs assessment completed in 2010 by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation identified a statewide backlog of more than \$1 billion. The state parks suffered from broken and outdated facilities, the result of decades of insufficient funding for regular maintenance and infrastructure improvement. Recognizing the parks’ importance to all New Yorkers, Governor Cuomo and the state legislature have taken strong steps to remedy the problem. To evaluate the merits of continued

investment, the Open Space Institute, with the support of the Dyson Foundation, commissioned a visitor survey of Minnewaska State Park Preserve. The study, aimed at finding out who visits the park and how they value it, was conducted by the Economic & Strategic Planning Consultancy of Randall Gross / Development Economics. Surveyors conducted a quantitative demographic study of 402 visitors over 13 weekdays, 7 weekend days, and the Labor Day holiday from July through September 2014. The sample presents with a 4.88% margin

of error at the 95% confidence level. The results are meant to inform park planning and communication efforts and also to provide input on specific questions relating to park utilization.

OSI & MINNEWASKA Founded in 1974 to protect significant landscapes in New York State, celebrated land conservation organization the Open Space Institute and its partners have more than doubled Minnewaska’s size over 20-plus years. The end result is an over 23,000 acre park preserve, all permanently protected and accessible to the public—and less than 100 miles from New York City.